

Statue of St Wenceslas at Wenceslas Square



Vltava Moldau River



Prague Castle

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/czech-republic#photo-26789-365> downloaded Nov 10 2009

### When to go

For the majority of Czech destinations, the best time to visit is in May or September, when the weather is mild and the crowds fewer. A large percentage of museums, galleries, castles and the like are open only during high season (May to September). April and October are chillier but you’ll benefit from smaller crowds and cheaper rooms. In winter you’ll likely get to see it all under a blanket of snow; camping grounds are closed, as are attractions in the smaller towns. High in the mountains, November to March is an additional high season.

Most Czechs, like residents of the rest of [Europe](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358537), take their holidays in July and August, then again over the Easter and Christmas/New Year holiday periods. Accommodation facilities are often booked; crowds, particularly in [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) and the mountain resort areas, can be unbearable; and prices spike to their highest. On the other hand, most festivals take place during the summer months and the supply of cheap sleeps in university towns increases as student dorms are thrown open to visitors.

The seasons are distinct. Summer (June to August) receives the highest temperatures and heaviest rainfall. The cold, bitter winter months of December, January and February often see temperatures reaching as low as -5°C in the cities and -10°C to -15°C in the mountainous areas (-30°C at higher altitudes). Tailor-made for skiing and other winter pursuits, the mountains receive about 130 days of snow a year, but other areas get coverage as well. Spring (late March to May) brings changeable, rainy weather and sometimes flooding. Autumn is also variable but temperatures can be as high as 20°C in September.

## History

The Good King Wenceslas of the Christmas carol fame was actually a prince, and the land he looked out over was the ancient territory of [Bohemia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358821). Beatified as St Wenceslas (svatý Václav in Czech), he remains the country’s patron saint.

In the heart of [Europe](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358537), the tides of war and imperial domination have washed through [Bohemia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358821) and [Moravia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358831) for centuries. Events in Czech history have impacted throughout [Europe](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358537). Two Habsburg councillors were thrown from a [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) Castle window in 1618 (the famous Defenestration of [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835)), igniting the Thirty Years War. Hitler’s 1938 annexation of the Sudetenland (the western borderlands of Czechoslovakia) triggered the final slide towards WWII.

The two ‘Golden Ages’ of Czech history were the rule of Charles IV (1346–78), who founded [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835)’s St Vitus Cathedral, built Charles Bridge and established Charles University; and the reign of Rudolf II (1576–1612), who made [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) the capital of the Habsburg Empire and drew many great artists, scholars and scientists to his court. [Bohemia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358821) and [Moravia](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358831) remained under Habsburg dominion for four centuries.

The 20th century was notable for the ‘years of eight’. Czechoslovakia was created after the fall of the Habsburg Empire in 1918, was occupied by the Nazis in 1938 and fell to a communist coup in 1948. The hopeful ‘[Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) Spring’, when censorship was relaxed and political prisoners were released, was crushed by the Soviet invasion of 1968.

The Velvet Revolution – the bloodless overthrow of the communist regime – however, didn’t happen until 1989. It was soon followed by the Velvet Divorce of 1993, when Czechoslovakia split into separate Czech and Slovak republics, the former led by famous playwright and former political prisoner Václav Havel, whose term in office lasted until 2003. The Czech Republic joined the European Union (EU) in 2004.

#### Train

International trains arrive at [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835)’s main train station, **Praha-hlavní nádraží** (Praha hl. n; Wilsonova, Nové Město), or the outlying **Holešovice** (Praha Hol; Vrbenského, Holešovice) and **Smíchov** (Praha Smv; Nádražní, Smíchov) stations.

[Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) and [Brno](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358832) lie on the main line from [Berlin](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=359364) and [Dresden](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=359408) to [Bratislava](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=360690) and Buda­pest, and from [Hamburg](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=359370) and [Berlin](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=359364) to [Vienna](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358656). Trains from Frankfurt and [Munich](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=359357) pass through [Nuremberg](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=359358) and [Plzeň](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358826) on the way to [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835). There are daily express trains between [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) and [Warsaw](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=360342) via [Wrocław](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=360329) or [Katowice](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=360273).

Buy tickets in advance from Czech Railways (České dráhy; ČD) ticket offices and travel agencies. Reservations are compulsory on international trains. International tickets are valid for two months with unlimited stopovers. Inter-Rail (Zone D) passes are valid in the Czech Republic, but Eurail passes are not.

### Money

#### Exchanging money

There’s a nationwide network of ATMs (bankomaty). The main banks – Komerční banka, Česká spořitelna, ČSOB and Živnostenská banka – are the best places to change cash and travellers cheques or get a cash advance on Visa or MasterCard. American Express and Thomas Cook offices change their own-brand cheques without commission.

Beware of the private exchange offices (směnárna), especially in [Prague](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/destinationRedirector?atlasId=358835) – theyadvertise misleading rates and often charge exorbitant commissions or ‘handling fees’.

Credit cards are widely accepted in petrol stations, midrange and top-end hotels, restaurants and shops.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prague>

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Karl%C5%AFv_most.jpg) Charles Bridge

[](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:VaclavnaVotobraze.jpg)

King Wenceslaus, King of the Romans